



# News

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## **DSHS' MEDICAL ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION VISITING MORE CITIES TO RENEW "COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS"**

**OLYMPIA** -- The Medical Assistance Administration of the Washington State Department of Social & Health Services (DSHS) will bring its "Community Conversations" back to another nine Washington cities in September, underscoring its promise to report back on strategic planning that began last spring.

In an era of spiraling health-care costs and rising public concern, the special "Community Conversations" began as a series of March and April brainstorming sessions that let people across the state describe the kinds of health services they want to see DSHS offer over the next six years. Participants were asked to help design a strategic plan that would stretch valuable resources without jeopardizing the vulnerable populations who depend on medical assistance.

### **What's ahead for Medicaid?**

Community Conversations will include a recap of the strategic plan developed from its earlier discussions. The meetings also will include an advance look at a Medicaid waiver proposal that would give the state more flexibility to manage the cost drivers and other trends that face health care today.

"We began this process with the promise that we'd return to the same communities to report back on how the planning has gone," said MAA Assistant Secretary Jim Wilson. "The first sessions we held were in Spokane and Colville. Now we're coming back."

"One part of truly listening to others' ideas is that we do something with what we're told," Wilson said. "We said from the start that we did not want this input to gather dust on a shelf, so we're committed getting back to the communities and saying, 'Here is what you told us. Here is what we're doing about it.'"

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Wilson said he and his Executive Leadership Team carefully considered what they heard and as a result decided to adopt the following four major strategies:

- **Simplify processes and integrate services**, i.e., Use proven technology to simplify processes for Medicaid clients and partner
- **Keep children healthy**, i.e., Focus on improving access to preventive services and services for children's health and well being through community partnerships.
- **Effectively manage resources**, i.e., Convene community and state partners to develop ways to simplify getting coverage, accessing services and retaining access to health care as circumstances change.
- **Ensure access**, i.e., Develop baselines to measure the adequacy of our provider network for both Healthy Options (managed care) and Fee-For-Service.

Wilson said Community Conversations team members will be available at the sessions to explain the planning process as well as describe upcoming changes in medical assistance, including other plans the agency is making to cope with high health-care costs in a tight budget year.

Those issues include a proposed Medicaid reform proposal scheduled to be submitted to the federal government later this fall. The sessions can help answer questions about a federal law called HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act) that also is bringing significant changes to the health care system over the next few years.

Community Conversations held second-round meetings earlier this summer in Spokane, Colville, Vancouver and Aberdeen. Additional meetings are scheduled in September at:

**Sept. 10, Bellingham, 5-8 p.m., Brigid Collin Center, 1231 N. Garden St., No. 200**  
**Sept. 13, Wenatchee, 5-8 p.m., Housing Authority Community Bldg, 1120 9<sup>th</sup> St.**  
**Sept. 14, Tri-Cities, 1-4 p.m., Comm. Action Center, 720 W Court St. (Pasco)**  
**Sept. 14, Yakima, 6-9 p.m., EPIC Castlevale, 2901 Castlevale Road**  
**Sept. 17, Seattle Metro South, Time and place to be announced**  
**Sept. 18, Seattle Metro North, Time and place to be announced**  
**Sept. 19, Fife, Time and place to be announced**  
**Sept. 21, Port Angeles, 6-9 p.m., Vern Burton Center, 308 E. 4th**  
**Sept. 25, Shoreline, Time and place to be announced**

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Community Conversations meetings include on-site child care and light refreshments. If you have special childcare or facility access needs, please contact Allena Barnes at (206) 772-5070 or [communityconversation@yahoo.com](mailto:communityconversation@yahoo.com). People who need interpreter services are requested to contact Tamishia Garrett at (360) 725-1879 or [garretl@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:garretl@dshs.wa.gov).